Some Thoughts on Symbolic Reproduction: Icons, Popular Ethos, and the Tradition of Commercial Framing in Japanese Sociohistory
象徴的再生産に関する一考察――日本の社会史に観る偶像と思潮の商業方程式

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Abstract:
拙稿は大衆社会の再生に果たす文化産業の役割を究明する意味で、日本における江戸期と現代のトレンド現象を比較し、象徴的生産の通時的なメカニズムを検討してみたものである。版画技術を利用した大量生産を史上で初めて可能にした江戸期の浮世絵産業、殊に人物画産業は、民衆の時代的な思潮である「浮世」に則しつつ歌舞伎役者や花魁といった「時のスターたち」を表象するイメージ商品の普及に努めた。そして錦絵問屋を軸に職人と町人、及びモデルとなる芸人たちが織り成す流通ネットワークは、モデルの差異化やシリーズ化に基づく消費システムの確立に大きく貢献した。偶像崇拝と思潮とプリントメディアの連帯からなるこの象徴生産の構図は、現代日本のタレントプロモーションのシステムにそのまま当てはまるが、この適用性の根拠についてはこれまで詳細な学術的探究がなされた形跡がないように思われる。本稿では構造的類似性と実践的継承の双方からこれを吟味し、日本における商品フェチシズムとそれが織りなすマーケット、そして象徴交換の場として作用する消費社会の歴史的位置付けを試みた。

キーワード：浮世絵産業、役者絵、美人画、タレントグッズ、偶像崇拝、消費主義、
象徴的競争、モデルのシリーズ化、浮世、流行文化

Tradition, or the way in which people pass on the life of culture from one generation to another, has been a locus of academic debate since Hobsbawm and Ranger's intriguing argument that practices people consider old are often recent sociopolitical inventions came to the fore (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983 ; see also Handler and Linnekin 1984, Bendix 1989, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998). How much of a specific kind of cultural phenomenon as it appears before us today has been inherited, and how much of it has been newly fashioned with a pretense of having a deep-root, are questions that pose intellectual challenges on those who deal with ethnohistoric inferences. In our era of globalism in which the world is regarded as an increasingly complex and dynamic entity with unprecedented degree of open regionalism (as manifested in the influx of information, people, and goods across national borders, due to the international encouragement of free trade) and unprecedented degree of cultural diversity (in the form of interplay between ideas, values, and lifestyles of varied local origins), the idea of tradition as well as related concepts such as cultural heritage, reproduction, and authenticity, are shifting their nuance from the static resistance to modernity to an open-ended subject (Phillips 1998).

In concurrence with this recent trend, Laforet's studies on the display of tribal artifacts in Canadian museums demonstrate how the members of museums and First Nations negotiate ways in which objects representing various aspects of native traditions are displayed, preserved, and owned. She shows how indigenous understandings of the relationship between stories and things differ from the conceptions governing Western scientific collecting, curating, and interpreting, and how this realization helps us redefine tradition as historical praxis : i.e., actions that are freed from constrictive association with a mythic past, and ontologically framed with respect to what really happened and is happening.*1 Such a pragmatic coordination enables analysts to bring into light the fact that museological translation is itself a sociohistorical process, or a matter of inter-cultural negotiation and struggle.*2 By seeing museums as contact zones where different sociohistorical practices clash and collaborate, one can specify how cultural knowledge is open to revision since history itself is open-ended and therefore subject to constant constitutions and revisions (quoted in Clifford 2003 : 161).

One may build on this perspective and convincingly argue (*a la* Phillips and Clifford) that in this period wherein many of the so-called backward, underdeveloped, traditional societies are making strong claims to historical agency and a distinctive modern identity, contact zones within a broader popular culture of exoticism and commoditization are subject to the politics of articulation : acts of power which can confirm or reject popular representations -whether these articulations are primitive stereotypes or post-/modernist reinterpretations of artifacts that are

regarded as “traditional” (see also Haley and Wilcoxon 1997). Yet, the exposition of indigenous rights and struggles is not my purpose here.

My goal in this essay is to examine how the pragmatic aspect of tradition can be applied to a conspicuous and recurrent form of visual representation in one and the same culture. I will compare two mutually-analogous forms of iconic signification in Japan -protomodern versus contemporary- and explore their interval in order to illustrate the way in which the structure of visual articulation has been preserved over the period of approximately 350 years -however visual contents and material conditions may have changed over time. Through this investigation, I intend to show how the single, most important framework of consumer capitalism, namely symbolic competition, emerged and became a part of cultural competence in Japanese society. In this particular inquiry, I will use “protomodern” to denote one portion of the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) : between the late 17th century and the mid 19th century, which marked the golden age of woodcut prints called *ukiyoe* or “pictures of the floating world.”

I concentrate on specific types of *ukiyoe* as objects of my study : *bijinga* or “beauty prints” and *yakushae* or “actor prints.” *Bijinga* represent prevalent images of *geisha*, courtesans, teahouse girls, and players of female roles in *kabuki* theater.*3 *Yakushae* feature pose-striking images of *kabuki* actors. *Kabuki* was one of the most popular kinds of stage performance through much of the Tokugawa era. *Kabuki* blended acting, dance, and music. It dramatized a wide variety of plays on stage in a form of public spectacle. These are two of the five main genres of *ukiyoe*.*4 Stylized portraits of popular personalities were produced in single-sheet, album, calendar and book-illustration formats. These items bear similarity to the so-called “idol goods” of the present-day Japan, including advertisement posters, calendars, albums, photos and magazine covers which feature the popular personalities of our time.

The large majority of existing studies on *ukiyoe*, mostly written by art-historians, tend to concentrate on the historical significance of *ukiyoe*, and they leave behind any systematic investigation concerning the continuous influence of *ukiyoe*-production technologies in modern and postmodern Japan. In the present ethnohistoric analysis, I will inspect *bijinga* and *yakushae* in order to better understand the way in which a specific style of cultural production that revolved around the objects of popular worship has been developed and maintained as a social institution, and in the process set the ground for consumerism to which the Japanese people today are accustomed.*5

Consumerism : A Theoretical Orientation

Consumerism implies social differentiation through acts of consumption. It is a continuous activity of self-construction and social interaction through commodity purchasing. Consumerism signifies a spirit of capitalism that facilitates the development of what Haug (1986) calls a "commodity world of attractive and seductive illusion" in which various commoditized fantasies shackle human desire for satisfaction and enjoyment in life to a drive towards certain styles of conformity. As Haug writes:

> An innumerable series of images are forced upon the individual, like mirrors, seemingly empathetic and totally credible, which bring their secrets to the surface and display them there. In these images, people are continually shown the unfulfilled aspects of their existence. The illusion integrates itself, promising satisfaction : it reads desires in one's eyes, and brings them to the surface of the commodity. While the illusion with which commodities present themselves to the gaze gives people a sense of meaningfulness, it provides them with a language to interpret their existence and the world. Any further world, different from that provided by the commodities, is almost no longer accessible to them (1986 : 52).

Thus, consumerism signifies a lifeworld imbued by stylized commodities. Fashion is a good example of consumerism : in a world controlled by the fashion industry, one competes with others over dressing elegantly. Since the Tokugawa era in Japan, having and maintaining an elegant appearance became the focus of expressive behavior for the middle-class women and men in urban areas.*6

In analyzing the present-day Japanese consumer culture, Clammer argues that the tendency for consumption decisions to concentrate around a middle-class identity in Japan indicates that social reality is recognized on the basis of a large but nevertheless surprisingly structured range of consumption choices : that is, things that are made available in the market. This is linked to similarity in income and the desire for homogeneity, a powerful cultural force in Japan. The middle-class orientation of consumer behavior in Japan today could be realized as an act of differentiation within an actually homogeneous social category. This empirically takes the form of symbolic competition over details of things purchased and styles that these things signify (Clammer 1997 : 102).

In this study, I will use idolatry, regarded here to be a form of commodity fetishism, as a tool to examine when and how the logic of consumerism has been traditionalized in Japan. I define "idolatry" as an attribute of popular culture : the process of stylization that involves selection and

appropriation of personality images that have a certain appeal to the public. These images are articulated in accordance with expectations that their producers and viewers have about the celebrities' appearances and personal qualities. The objects of idolatry with which I will be concerned in this study are *bijinga* and *yakushae* models on the one hand, and, on the other hand, contemporary idol stars. I will treat the former as protomodern equivalents of the latter, and illustrate their qualitative, functional, and contextual commonalities.

According to Wolff, popular artifacts bear imprints of ideas, values, and conditions of existence of identifiable social groups at particular historical moments in the form of social performances (Wolff 1981 : 41, quoted in Robertson 1998 : 37). I will apply this to the comparative analysis presented below between *ukiyoe* and idol goods. I situate these idol-featuring prints in a cultural matrix, which Robertson defines as a field in which social forces and relations are generated and reproduced, stimulated by encounters with ideas, things, and peoples both within and outside of the field - as a whole or any area within the field in particular. These forces and relations develop continuously as a complex series of communication technologies, increased literacy, and a market economy premised on choice and competition (Robertson 1998 : 35).

Contesting Popular Personalities : Then and Now

Ukiyoe emerged as book illustrations and theatrical billboards in the early 17th century, and were developed into single sheet prints by the end of that century. The use of woodblock allowed these prints to be mass-produced and commercialized in the market. Historians tend to agree that *bijinga* and *yakushae* were widely circulated in Edo (former Tokyo), which became the center of *ukiyoe* production. To be sure, it was not only in Edo that *ukiyoe* were produced : *bijinga* and *yakushae* were produced in large quantity in the region of Kamigata, which centered around two older cities of Kyoto and Osaka, and Kamigata styles and techniques inspired *ukiyoe* masters who worked in Edo from time to time.

The fact that by the late 18th century many of these idol portraits may have circulated throughout the country due to the development of transportation systems and the corresponding growth of tourism (most notably shrine visiting, if not business trips) is supported by landscape prints such as *The Scene of Itoi* from a 69-part series of the Kiso Highway, and *The Scene of Kōji* from a 53-part series of the Tōkai Highway. Both of these works by Hiroshige Utagawa (1797-1858) show *yakushae* and *bijinga* being posted on the walls of local shops along with billboards that advertised their publishers - just as posters of popular personalities are posted on the walls

and windows of local shops throughout Japan today. Now and then, these posters functioned and are functioning as effective signifiers of personalities that appear on them, their sponsors, and any accompanying products (Figures 1a and 1b).

Early examples of *yakushae* appeared as book illustrations in the late 17th century. Some of these examples such as *Yakusha Ōkagami Gassai* (*The Great-Mirror Collection of Actors*), published around 1692, and *Sinban Yakushae Zukushi* (*The New Edition of Best Actors*), published around the same time, featured images of posed *kabuki* actors, on the sides of which appeared comments about them or famous lines they uttered on stage. The single-sheet *yakushae*, which are classical versions of contemporary idol shots, otherwise known as *buromaido* or "bromide photos," appeared soon afterward.*7

Although it is difficult to calculate how many of these idol prints and related texts were actually sold and bought during the Tokugawa period, one could gather some clues from written and visual records of that time. The popularity of male actors and their images could be inferred, for instance, from an introductory passage in *Yakusha Ōkagami Gassai* that was mentioned earlier. In this work, the publisher stated, "These prints sell very well each year, so we enlarged the size of our new prints to make sure that [the actors'] features could be captured in greater detail." Apparently, actor prints from this publisher attracted many buyers.

In 1789, a high state-official by the name of Sadanobu Matsudaira (1758-1829) executed a social reform. One of the primary objectives of this reform was to keep customs in check (e.g., Screech 1999 : 59-64). The fact that the state authority repeatedly tried to regulate the publication of *ukiyoe* throughout this and the later period of Tenpō Reform (1841) suggests that these prints were influential enough to pose a threat to the moral order of the state. The magistrate office of Edo issued notes during the latter reform period that prohibited any printing, selling or purchasing of single-sheet personality prints since the state regarded these prints as "vulgar" or "demoralizing." Nevertheless, the production and circulation of these prints continued, allowing the network of artisans, publishers, and consumers to prosper. The Tenpō Reform prohibited the selling of any *ukiyoe* for more than 16 *mon* (which was about the price of a bowl of soba-noodles), so one could infer the average cost of *bijinga* and *yakushae* at the time, and a greater price before then. Unlike paintings, which were considered much pricier, mass-produced *ukiyoe* were affordable to the public. One *mon* is a contemporary equivalent of 20 Japanese yen, which means that on average personality prints were valued at around 320 yen. This is about the same price as today's bromide photos, and is also about the same cost of a bowl of soba-noodles in a contemporary Japanese fast-food stand.

In the earliest stage of their development, the single-sheet prints were referred to as *tan'e* or "red-color prints" for reddish colors that were hand-painted onto printed black lines. Kiyonobu Torii (1644-1729) was a leading artisan in this genre. He and his successor Kiyomasu Torii (years of birth and death are unknown) created a style that represented the masculinity of male actors by means of robust bodylines (Figure 2). This style became the trademark of the Torii School, which specialized in producing the single-sheet *yakushae* of famous *kabuki* actors who struck "groovy" poses, known at the time as *aragoto*, which could be literally translated as "rough business." Kiyomasu simultaneously developed a style that used relatively thinner lines and lighter colors to represent the femininity of popular onnagata (players of the female role) and courtesans, which became an early example of *bijinga*.[*8]

The development of schools became a common practice in the production of *ukiyoe* as in other demonstrative genres of the so-called *shokunin waza* or "artisans' skills" of the time, which include painting, lacquer-ware, ceramics, textile, and carpentry. In all of these genres, production techniques were developed and handed down from one generation to another in the form of an apprenticeship. The apprenticeship system in *ukiyoe* began with Moronobu Hishikawa (1618?-1694?) who founded *ukiyoe* as a mass-produced art-form of printing. He took four known apprentices, including two of his sons. The production of *ukiyoe* consisted of three parts : image designing, woodblock carving, and printing by applying sheets of paper on carved woodblocks. These parts were organized in such a way that *ukiyoe* masters specialized in preparatory drawings while publishers handled carving and printing by hiring master carvers and printers.

In 1765, Harunobu Suzuki (1725?-1770) developed an elaborate form of *bijinga* called *azuma nishikie* (lit. "eastern brocade prints"). *Azuma* here refers to Edo where Suzuki had his studio and produced hundreds of works in the short time-frame of ten years. Suzuki became the client of a high-ranking state official by the name of Kyosen Ōkubo who headed a group of wealthy poets called Edoza Hakai or "Edo Poets Association." This group regularly held poetry conventions in which participants, including literati, abbots, nuns, as well as high-ranking courtesans, sang various poems. In competitions, these poems were evaluated according to their lyrical qualities. Edoza Haikai conventions also became a place where participants exhibited their favorite pictorial calendars (*egoyomi*). Ōkubo's group used these conventions as a site to display Harunobu's *azuma nishikie* calendars. Harunobu copied many of his images from Sukenobu Nishikawa (1671-1750) who was a famed book illustrator in Kamigata. Yet, he refined Sukenobu's illustration style by incorporating thin bodylines and elaborate coloring that together expressed the delicate features of courtesans and characters that appeared in classic tales (Figure 7b).[*9]

Aside from the development of elaborate representation, Harunobu invented a new pattern in which the images of beauties were packaged. He produced *Seirō Bijin Awase* (*Competition of Bordello Beauties*), a five-volume series of colored prints featuring 166 high-ranking courtesans of his time.*[10] The image of each courtesan is accompanied by a poem purportedly written by her, and the title printed on the top corner indicated the name of the street on which her house was located. This work, published shortly after Harunobu's death in 1770, set the frame by which idolized personalities were symbolically contested. A buyer of this serialized product was made to compare one image against another, and perhaps made to choose which image was his or her favorite one.

Numerous subsequent publications (or "copy cats" to use a contemporary capitalist analogy) emerged as their producers used Harunobu's cross-textual format as a model, contributing to the habituation of symbolic competition in a form of *shinasadame*, which meant making one's choice from a given set of goods and adopting it as a part of his or her lifestyle. Examples of these subsequent series include *Seirō Bijin Awase Sugata Kagami* (*Beautiful Courtesans Compared in a Mirror*), published in 1776 as a collective work between two artists Shigemasa Kitao (1739-1820) and Shunshō Katsukawa (1726-1792) ; *Seirō Meikun Jihitsu Sugata* (*Collection of Calligraphy by Celebrated Courtesans*), published in 1783, and *Shin Bijin Awase Jihitsu Kagami* (*Competition of New Beauties in a Mirror*), published in 1784 (Figure 3a), which were both produced by Masanobu Kitao (1761-1816) ; and *Tōsei Bijin Awase* (*Competition of Contemporary Beauties*), which was published in the early 19th century as a work by Kunisada Utagawa (1786-1864).

These serialized images bear similarity to the images of idol stars that appear in a variety of published forms. One interesting contemporary example is the January 1996 issue of a popular information magazine called *Panja*. On the cover of this issue, an idol Sayaka Yoshino strikes a stylized pose. One of the descriptions to her right reads "Pheromone beauties vs. fashion beauties : an endless battle," indicating a narrative that facilitates symbolic competition. In the same way as serialized *bijinga* from the Tokugawa era, popular magazines such as this function as a showcase for talents including young, prospective idols (Figure 3b). In both past as well as present, idolized personalities strike shapely poses that are considered "classy" or "cool." Together these texts constitute a showcase of competing idol-images.

Fashion manuals were published along with these *bijinga* collections. These include *Ehon Imayō Kona* (*A Picture Book of Contemporary Cosmetics*), published in 1797, and *Miyako Fūzoku Keshō Den* (*The Legend of City Fashions*), published in 1813. Images that appear in these fashion manuals bear similarities to those of contemporary fashion models in widely distributed fashion

magazines such as *An-An, Non-No,* and *Can-Cam*. A typical comparison is found between page 31 of the first volume of *Miyako Fūzoku Keshō Den* and the cover page of Shōgakukan's Autumn 1996 issue of *Can-Cam* in which stylized images of femaleness are represented. Featured in these texts are *machimusume* or a city girl of that time, on the one hand, and pop-idol Ryōko Shinohara, on the other, in their latest hairstyles and make-ups. Written narratives that signify their hairstyles, thinly trimmed eyebrows and other facial features appear around these images (compare Figures 4a and 4b). Both of these examples demonstrate how to become "classy" by stylizing one's hair and eyebrows.

Publishers of protomodern idol texts, such as Senkakudō, Rinkakudō, and Kōshōdō emerged, contending with each other for public recognition -just as contemporary publishers such as Kō dansha, Shūeisha, and Shōgakkan would do in order to establish their positions in Japanese society. Owners of these publishers, such as Jūzaburō Tsutaya (1750-1797) of Kōshōdō and Kī yemon Tsuruya (active mid 17th-early 18th century) of Senkakudō, demonstrated their abilities to hire excellent artisans of the time, including Utamaro Kitagawa (1753-1849), Sharaku Tōshūsai (years of birth and death are unknown) ; Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1849), and Masanobu Kitao (1761-1816).*11 A good example of the type of symbolic packaging that was manifested in *ukiyoe* production at the time is a piece by Utamaro titled *San Bijin* or *Three Beauties* (Figure 5). This piece portrays Okita, Ohisa, and Toyohina, who were idolized as the three most beautiful women of the Kansei era (1789-1800). Okita and Ohisa were teahouse girls, while Toyohina was a *geisha*. On the lower left of this text is the logo of Tsutaya, under which Utamaro's signature is printed. Such a print signifies not only the images of popular personalities, but it also acknowledges and authorizes its copywriter (Utamaro) as well as its publisher (Tsutaya).

Fandom as the Cult of Consumption

Beginning in the early 18th century, a certain attitude of a person, *tsū*, developed as the model by which a privileged consumer was expected to act. *Tsū* signified "worldly sophistication" and a person who exemplified it. "World" in this case implied the public lifeworld of Edoites, which may also be referred to as the lifeworld of commoners in which merchants played a key role. As Siegle (1993) explains, a *tsū* person not only had to have a playful spirit, but also the ability to develop good relationships in the pleasure quarters, and the skill to publicly display one's sophistication. Siegle argues that such a person, representing generosity, courtesy, consideration, intelligence, wit, candor, refinement, and urbanity, could be found represented as a hero in illustrated story

books called *sharebon* (lit. "witty books"). She elaborates:

> The consummate *tsū* was an elegant man-about-town who dabbled in music, painting, poetry, popular song, haiku, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and calligraphy. A sign of the *tsū*'s worldly sophistication was for him to be seen at the theatre and the Yoshiwara [which was the main pleasure quarter of Edo], and to be knowledgeable about the pleasure quarter. His behavior was such that courtesans and staff of the Yoshiwara appreciated him and treated him well. ...*Tsū* were such celebrities that a list of the "Eighteen Great *Tsū*" was complied from time to time after the An'ei era [1722-1781], including men who were role models for the aspiring dandies of the Edo (1993:131,132, brackets mine).

Tsū represented the amalgamation of a playful spirit, worldly knowledge, and the desire to present oneself in public -that was premised, of course, on rich economic grounds.

One could envision what a *tsū* person looked like from a print by Toyonobu Ishikawa, which was published in the 1750s (Figure 6a). A *tsū* person, possibly a wealthy merchant, sits in a colorfully decorated room of a brothel house. He is surrounded by a courtesan and her servants. He and the courtesan lean toward each other, while one female servant tries to pour sake into his cup. Another female servant is banging on a *shamisen*, a stringed instrument that is typically associated with brothel entertainment. Another servant (male) appears to be clapping his hands to lighten up the atmosphere, while one other female servant sits quietly next to a large plate of food, ready to serve at any time she is ordered to do so. For a *tsū* man, spending his pastime with his favorite courtesan was a sign that he had enough monetary power and the knowledge about brothel customs to be recognized as a patron.

Some *tsū* persons such as Masanobu Kitao were not only merchants, but also artisans and writers. Masanobu was the "artisan name" of the writer, Kyōden Santō, which was the pen name of a cigar merchant. His love of playing not only led him to produce such known works as *Shin Bijin Awase Jihitsu Kagami* (*Competition of New Beauties in a Mirror*) that was mentioned earlier, and *Musuko Beya* (*Young Men's Penthouse*) which served as a manual for the "art of playing" for the readers of his time, but also to take a young courtesan as his wife.

Tsū is still used today to refer to a similar personality in Japanese popular culture and the mass media. A number of dedicated idol-star followers who become producers by acquiring the know-how could be called *tsū*, though many of these curious individuals today are more likely to end up as *otaku* or "hard-core aficionados" (Craig 2000 : 6).[*12] Universities, considered to be institutes of formal education that reflect the elitist values of Japan today, also function as nurturing grounds for these *tsū* (as well as *otaku*) persons. The so-called *aidoru kenkyūkai* or "idol study groups"

develop as informal groups, otherwise known as *saakuru* or "circle of friends," in most urban Japanese universities. These study groups act as agents of a subculture that provide students with a refuge from routine work in school -just as poetry circles such as Edoza Haikai operated as a center for subcultural transmission during the Tokugawa period. These groups develop a space in which students can socialize with each other informally, and construe their world in ways not available to them through formal education.

The members of these idol study groups spend much of their time exchanging ideas and opinions about idol stars. Their activities include going to *karaoke* boxes to sing idol songs, following idols to concerts, and, of course, purchasing idol goods. More formalized activities contain holding idol concerts on university campus, for which they contact promotion agencies and invite some of their favorite young talents. As in the case of the *tsū* person that appear in Toyonobu Ishikawa's *ukiyoe* print, contemporary idol-*tsū* students hold these events not only as a place where they enjoy close encounters with their favorite idols, but also as a place where they publicly demonstrate their qualifications as idol connoisseurs (Figure 6b).

Other contemporary idol-*tsū* student activities include publishing idol fanzines, commonly known as *minikomishi* or "mini-communication magazines." "Mini" in this case refers to the fact that these magazines are expected to have limited circulation -among colleagues- and therefore can be differentiated from "mass-communicated magazines." Each issue of these journals, sold for approximately 500 to 700 yen, consists of rank charts of popular idols according to the members' evaluations, critiques of idols by the members, and interview articles that feature some of the members' favorite idols. Such a mode of localized journalism bears a great degree of similarity to a genre of popular literature from the Tokugawa period that is represented by *sharebon* or "humorous books," which are pocket-sized novels that discussed how to approach popular courtesans of that time. Nakao's extensive research on this subject suggests that *sharebon* literature began in a subcultural form of writing by infamous writers who preferred to find their inspirations in brothel houses rather than in their scholarships. What originated as little more than hobby-like newsletters for brothel aficionados in the early part of the 1700's developed into a major genre of literature called *sharebon* in a matter of fifty years, giving birth to a new generation of celebrated *tsū* writers such as Kyōden Santō (Nakao 1984 : 94, 95).

Just as some enthusiastic *tsū* persons of the Tokugawa era such as Kyōden Santō participated in the promotion of *kabuki* stars and courtesans through artistic production, some enthusiastic idol fans of present-day seek their jobs in various media institutions that specialized in the production of idols and idol-related texts. Not surprisingly, some fans who became idol promoters

are married to their favorite idol-stars. Self-aggrandizement is the single, most important driving force of *tsū* persons in the past as well as present. These aficionados of idolatry utilize affairs such as idol concerts, brothel houses, and voluntary publications to enhance their public personae as well as their sense of attachment to these personae.

Going with the Flow : Popular Culture and the Spirit of Consumerism

In the preface of a book titled *Ukiyo Monogatari* (*Stories of the Floating World*), which was published in 1665, the author Ryōi Asai (1612?-1691) used the term *ukiyo* or "floating world" to represent the ethos of that era in which the spirit of consumer capitalism as we know of it today was sprouting. Asai combined the Buddhist notion of an impermanent world with an attitude that celebrated life, transforming the rather pessimistic meaning of the original term into an optimistic one. To understand *ukiyo* was to realize not only that the lifeworld is impermanent, but also to enlighten one's life through the art of playing when this impermanence is realized.

In *ukiyo*, according to Asai, people could become "pieces of squash that float away in the river." They are all entitled to go with the flow as they entertain their lives with amusements, songs, and drinking along the way. Taking anything seriously in such a world is the "disease of the heart." Thus, Asai defined the freewheeling lifestyle of the floating world in which playfulness, creativity, and economic productivity were amalgamated. Underlined by this spirit, pleasure quarters, including theaters and brothels, developed in major cities such as Edo and played a central role in the creation of popular fashions and customs. Trendsetters and trend-buyers interacted and developed networks of actors, artisans, their middle-class benefactors, and consumers that turned the city into the powerhouse of Japan's popular culture. Indeed, *ukiyo* became a code that marked the popular spirit that supported the capitalist mode of production during the Tokugawa era.

This process of popular cultural establishment bears striking similarity to the last three decades of popular cultural growth in Japan. In literature, there has been a fundamental shift since the early 1970s in the way culture in Japan is understood, particularly literary culture. A new generation of writers, represented by Banana Yoshimoto, has developed idiomatic ties with billboards, television commercials, pop songs and fashion magazines, which appear in the eyes of the critics as an unconditional capitulation to commercial forces that operate as the "nefarious agent behind the production of popular culture" (Treat 1996 : 279).

This new style of writing has influenced a great number of adolescents who have been encouraged to enjoy consumer lifestyles (for example, modern boutiques, brand-name products,

and Western-style fast foods). This, according to the critics, marks a clean break with earlier "pure" fashion valorized as "intellectual" or "critical" by shifting its focus from basic questions of humanity towards a fiction intimately targeted towards an audience and point of view never too removed from the center arena of contemporary Japanese public culture (Treat 1996 : 278-280). This trend in literature could be perceived as part of a larger trend in which a new generation of people wish to break away, at the peak of Japan's postwar socioeconomic growth, from the traditional working ethics that focused on asceticism -as was the case with city dwellers of the Tokugawa period, especially merchants and artisans, who wished to break away from the traditional Buddhist- and government-guided asceticism that governed their lives. In Japan today, the word *karuchaa* from the English "culture" can have two, mutually-opposed meanings : as such, the word denotes "high culture" which encompasses traditional customs and literature ; on the other hand, it could refer to popular culture that is premised on resisting the high culture when the *karu* part of the word is related to another Japanese term *karui*. In this way, *karuchaa* is literally translated as "light culture." Originated sometime in the mid 1980s, this new meaning, "light culture," had become the signifier of a new ethos, especially that represented by young people, which encouraged the breaking away from traditional values that may be considered "too heavy," "suppressive," or "inflexible." It had come to signify the unsophisticated, uncritical, and therefore "light-hearted" approach of the masses toward culture.

One may infer from these data that the idea of going with the flow and being playful in this flow is emphasized in both *ukiyo* and the contemporary world of popular culture. In fact, the term "popular culture" is translated in Japanese as *ryūkō bunka* or "flowing culture," which signifies "cultural flow." It represents the commodity-embellished world in which people are driven to organize their life, develop their sense of selves, and construct their identities in reference to things that are available in the market.

Symbolic Packaging as a Traditional Praxis

Most art-historians would agree that the resemblance between the protomodern and contemporary manners of idol packaging is not accidental, and that there is a definite historical connection between these two styles of iconic production. Yet, exactly how this connection is made has been left uninvestigated. In this section, I will probe "likening" and "preserved artisanship" to be the two, more or less conscious ways in which protomodern and contemporary iconic representations are associated with each other. Likening is a means by which idol

packagers creatively, playfully, and arbitrarily project classical patterns onto their subjects, allowing the viewers to see contemporary icons in "classy" ways. Preserved artisanship is a manner in which the techniques of iconic articulation are carefully inherited, enabling artisans to develop new styles out of old nutshells.

Likening

One may easily establish an analogical tie between the protomodern and contemporary forms of idol representation, as I have done in this paper : treating *kabuki* actors and courtesans as the classical equivalents of contemporary pop idols, and seeing structural similitude between these two modes of articulation. The fact that trendsetters set up a metaphoric link between their representational practice and what they consider to be a traditional form of expression is evidenced by a manner of identification called *mitate* or "likening," which is to model a new thing after another, better-known or more meaningful thing (Hattori 1975). Likening has been a common practice in Japan -as evidenced in Zen gardens which are to be viewed as an ideal landscape, most notably what in Buddhism is regarded as *jōdo* or paradise to be entered upon obtaining nirvana. In *sadō* or the way of tea, designing a teahouse after a boat, and a flowerpot to be placed in its alcove after a squash, that together float away in the river are ways to configure the idea of impermanence. In both of these cases, likening provides its practitioners with a means to highlight, and thereby appreciate the value of presence -the moment in which Zen, tea-making and tea-drinking is put to practice.

Literati, artisans and media agents practiced likening during the Tokugawa era as a means to provide their consumers of their artworks with a sense of elegance - as can be seen in in the composition of popular poetries in the image of poetries found in famous ancient texts such as *The Tale of Genji*. In such a case, an 11th century tale that explored affection, friendship, courtship, filial piety, and the meanings of life and death through a series of short fictive sagas in which the main character Hikaru Genji, a man of royalty, interacted with his acquaintances in the court and engaged in love affairs with his lovers is used to incarnate the playful, edutaining spirit of the masses. Many scenes from *sharebon* and *ukiyoe* idealized imaginable scenes from *The Tale of Genji* as a way of authenticating popular courtships and groupie customs of the masses during the Tokugawa era.

One contemporary example of likening in popular idolatry is a 1993 photo album called *Ukiyoe Romance*, featuring an idol group, C.C. Girls in various poses that resemble Utamaro style

woodcut prints. The producing staff incorporated postures found in traditional *bijinga* into their signification of C.C. Girls as sexually appealing (Figure 7a). This bears similarity to an example of *bijinga* from the Tokugawa period by Harunobu titled *Mitate Ashiba Daruma* (*A Young Girl in the Image of Dharma Standing on a Reed in a Pond*) that sets up an analogous link between the imagined purity of a young, innocent girl and the classic image of Buddhist saint, Dharma, who, after years of meditative practice, could empty his mind to the extent that nothing -not even a matter as soft, light, smooth, and clear as water- could resist him. *Ukiyoe* examples such as this are abundant (Figures 7a and 7b). In both of these cases, producers constructed their images in reference to classical representations in order to impress their subjects upon the viewers' consciousness. Through these comparative illustrations, viewers can appreciate both the traditional causes and innovative effects of what they see at the same time as appreciating the imaginative skills of their artisans.

Preserved Artisanship

Another example of traditionalization found in Japanese iconic representation is a continuous process in which the systems and techniques of idol-packaging have been passed down from one generation of artisans to another in a form of preserved artisanship. Since its establishment in the latter half of the 17th century, the commercial network of *ukiyoe* artists, media agencies, and consumers, has been more or less consciously conserved, allowing, on the one hand, well-known *bijinga* and *yakushae* to be reproduced over and over again, and, on the other hand, applied systems of iconic production to be generated in accordance with changes in material and technological conditions. Thus the system of *bijinga* production paved the way for commercial institutes that mass-produced and mass-distributed lithographic, copper-plated, and/or photographic images of courtesans and *geisha* girls during the earlier half of the modern period (1870s-1920s) (Figures 8a and 8b).

In 1921, a company by the name of Maruberudō developed a system for mass-producing bromide photos of female and male movie stars, monopolizing the market for nearly eight subsequent decades in this genre of idol goods (Figure 8b). This enabled the practice of applying photography to capturing and realizing the shiny moments of a pop star to be preserved over eight decades, stamping upon the consciousness of Japanese consumers various images and names of celebrities as well as the frame in which these images are represented and marketed. Iconic production in Japan today operates on the extension of these previous manifestations -as a

system of symbolic production based on an increasingly elaborate social, technological, and commercial association of graphic designers, publishers, pop-idol promotion agencies, advertisers, sponsoring corporations, and consumers.

Deep-Rooted Inventions and Invented Deep-Roots : The Dynamic of Symbolic Reproduction

My interviews with a little over 60 agents of Japanese print media revealed that most of these agents did not recognize the exact origin of the production system in which they worked. Only when I inquired, few of these trendsetters compared their practices with *ukiyoe* artisans, and few of them said that they could see contemporary idols as analogous to courtesans and *geisha* since they both could be perceived as commercialized personalities. None of these agents directly related their practices to *ukiyoe* artistry. These are indices of the fact that the practice of traditionalization is not necessarily a conscious act of enculturation -even though the social impact of the practice is distinct.

All in all, this case study used idolatry as a window to explore the modes and relations of production that provided the basis of consumer capitalism. I explored how these modes and relations have been traditionalized by examining *ukiyoe* prints such as *bijinga* and *yakushae* in comparison to contemporary idol-texts. The way in which the single, most important aspect of consumerism, namely symbolic competition, was configured is inferred by examining the relationship between iconic prints, attitudes which their producers embraced, and the ethos of the time that signified the freewheeling lifestyle of merchants. Merchants were shown to utilize idolatry in order to habituate consumerism and enrich their middle-class lifestyles in Japanese culture and society.

The social relationship between producers and artisans revolved around popular personalities, constituting a system that provided the public with a series of contested images. This system, along with the ethos that emphasized playfulness, facilitated consumption in such a way that members of the public could incessantly choose their favorite items from the set of commoditized texts, and incorporate images that are represented in these texts into their everyday lives as a part of amusement. This system of symbolic mass-production emerged in the Tokugawa period, and it continues to govern our socioeconomic lifestyle today -even though commoditized items shifted from *ukiyoe* prints to photos, and even when the images of popular personalities shifted from *kabuki* actors, courtesans and *geisha* to contemporary idol stars.

By focusing on the configuration of idolatry as a traditional praxis, I hope to have contributed to the understanding of what Harvey calls the "urbanization of capital," or the process in which labor, working under capitalist (or capitalist-like) control, creates environments with specific kinds of spatial configurations (Harvey 1985 : xv). This process allows the agents of capitalism, or agents who are economically capable of conducting various acts of investment, to shape in their own image physical landscapes and by extension social relations. By examining certain manners in which the images of popular personalities were produced, marketed, and consumed, I have shown how culture industries secure their place in a Japanese cultural matrix, and how the mechanism of this industrialization process could be compared over time.

Figures

Figure 1. a) An enlarged part of Hiroshige's landscape print *The scene of Itoi*, featuring posted *bijinga* (left); and b) A scene from the street of a local town featuring talent posters (right).

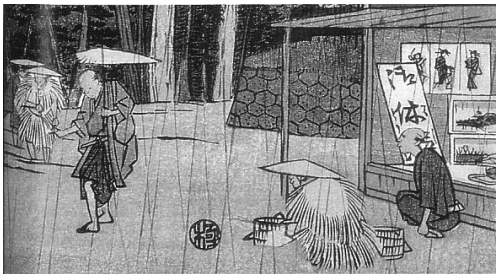


Figure 2. A *yakushae* by Kiyomasu Torii featuring a groovy image of popular *kabuki* superstar, Danjūrō Ichikawa.

Figure 3. a) Part of *Yoshiwara Shin Bijin Awase Jihitsu Kagami* (1784) (left); and b) January 1996 issue of *Panja* (right).

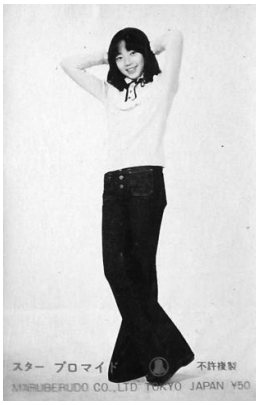
Figure 4. a) A page from *Miyako Fūzoku Keshōden* (1813) (left); and b) The cover of Shōgakkan's Autumn 1996 issue of *Can-Cam* featuring fashionable image of an idol Ryōko Shinohara (right).

Figure 5.　A *bijinga* by Utamaro titled *Three Beauties*.

Figure 6.　a) A *tsū* person playing in a brothel house (an 18th century print by Toyonobu Ishikawa) (left); and b) In a university in Tokyo, the members of an idol study circle hosts an event in which their favorite idol is invited (1995) (right).

Figure 7. a) A cover of a published photo album, *Ukiyoe Romance*, featuring an idol-group C.C. Girls (1993) (left); and b) A late-18th century *bijinga* print by Harunobu Suzuki entitled *Mitate Ashiba Daruma* (right).

Figure 8. a) A postcard from the early 20th century featuring popular *geisha* girls (left); and b) A Maruberudō bromide-photo featuring a pop star, Kumiko Aimoto (right).



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＊1　From the point of view of indigenous people, stories are not so much told about artifacts as artifacts are performative instances of stories.

＊2　*See Canadian Museum of Civilization*, in which Andrea Laforet demonstrates her views as the main author.

＊3　*Kabuki* initially developed in the early 17th century as a theatrical performance that involved actors who were both men and women. The state, in the name of maintaining moral order, immediately prohibited women and children from acting on stage. As the result, some men specialized in playing the roles of women on stage. These men were known as *onnagata* or "actors who strike female poses."

＊4　The other three types are: *shunga* which represent overtly sexual scenes of lovemaking; *fūkeiga* or "landscape prints" which feature scenic sites; and *kachōzu* or "figures of flowers and birds" which illustrate plants and animals.

＊5　Hundreds of books and articles on *ukiyoe* and the Japanese print media are written in Japanese. For a good introductory text, see, for example, the Volume 15 of Kōdansha's *Art Japanesque* (1982) titled *Ukiyoe To Chō nin: Edo Media Art (Woodcut Prints and Merchants: Edo Media-Arts)*. Siegle (1993) offers detailed interpretations of *ukiyoe* and other forms of popular arts in order to reconstruct the lifestyle of Edo commoners. For the use of shunga as a window to understand the freewheeling lifeworld of Edoites during the Tokugawa era, see Screech (1999). Screech is careful about the use of popular sources, and he rightly suggests that there is a danger in seeing these sources as reflections of social reality. He regards them more as the inclusion of facts within the fictional frame. Still, his focus is on the contents of these sources and how their readers regarded these image-texts. In this paper, I am trying to provide a new perspective by using *ukiyoe* as symbolic constituents of an emergent industrial system in Japan. I am taking Screech's treatment of *ukiyoe* as objects of worship one step further, and regarding them as objects of commodity fetishism *a la* Marx (1992[1887]: 76-87).

＊6　The word for "elegance" in Japanese is *fūryū*, which could be literally translated as "stylistic appearances." This word has been used continuously at the mass level since the protomodern era, until *eregansu* from English "elegance" took over in the late 1960s.

＊7　Interestingly, the word *han* is used today to count these photos, while *mai* may be a more appropriate counter for sheet-shaped objects. *Han* was a counter for woodcut prints during the Tokugawa era and this was applied to bromide photos - indicating the identity between these two forms of commercial art.

＊8　Thoughout this paper, I will codify the names of *ukiyoe* masters who are mentioned more than once: for each of these masters, I will describe the full name first, and the first name from the second time onward. This is because many masters shared the same family name as part of their apprenticeship, and hence would be easier to identify them with their first names than their last.

＊9　The fame of Harunobu's works could be inferred from a passage of *Ukiyoe Ruikō* (*Thoughts on Ukiyoe Styles*), which was an *ukiyoe* review that introduced *ukiyoe* masters, signified their styles, and provided the author Nanpo Ōta's evaluation of these styles in chronological order. In the section introducing Harunobu, Ōta stated that the appearance of *ukiyoe* changed completely with the rise of Harunobu's *azuma nishikie* in the second year of Meiwa (1765).

＊10　The production of *ukiyoe* in serial forms existed from the early stage of *ukiyoe* development. One could find, for example, twelve-part series of single-sheet prints by Moronobu Hishikawa and Masanobu Okumura - long before Harunobu emerged in the world of *ukiyoe*. Yet, these earlier series were not intended to be sets of contested personal images. They were more likely twelve different parts of the same or similar subject.

＊11　According to Nanpo Ōta's ukiyoe review, Sharaku was unpopular at the time because his images were too deformed to fit the taste of Edoites. Sharaku's works gained wider public recognition much later on in the history of *ukiyoe*.

＊12　For a good read on the otaku subcultural phenomena in contemporary Japan, see Kinsella (1998).